

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

World History (Honors)

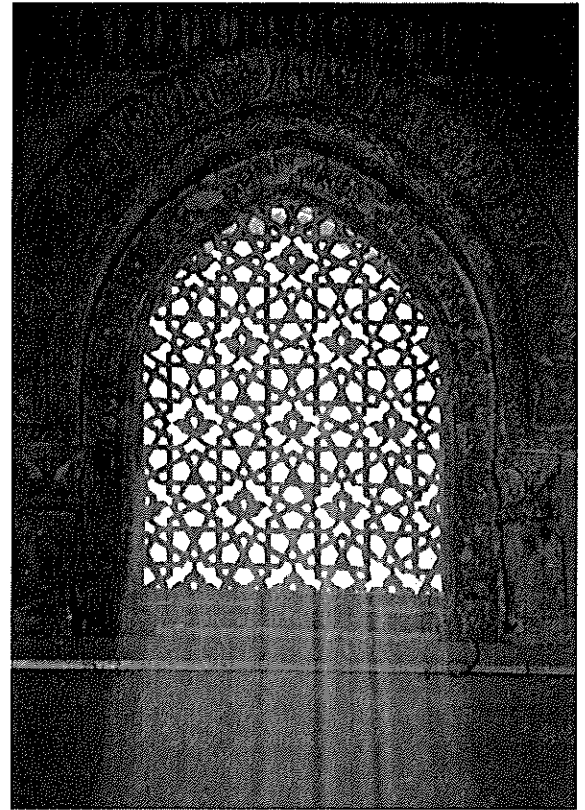
## The Spread of Islam D.B.Q.

One question I most often hear people voice is “how did Islam spread so quickly?” Another question that often comes up is “*was* Islam spread by the sword?” And, yet another question is “was everyone under Muslim rule actually Muslim?”

For this reason, and also because Islam left behind so much more than military conquests, I present to you this DBQ!

**DBQ: How did Islamic civilization spread to encompass such an extensive area?**

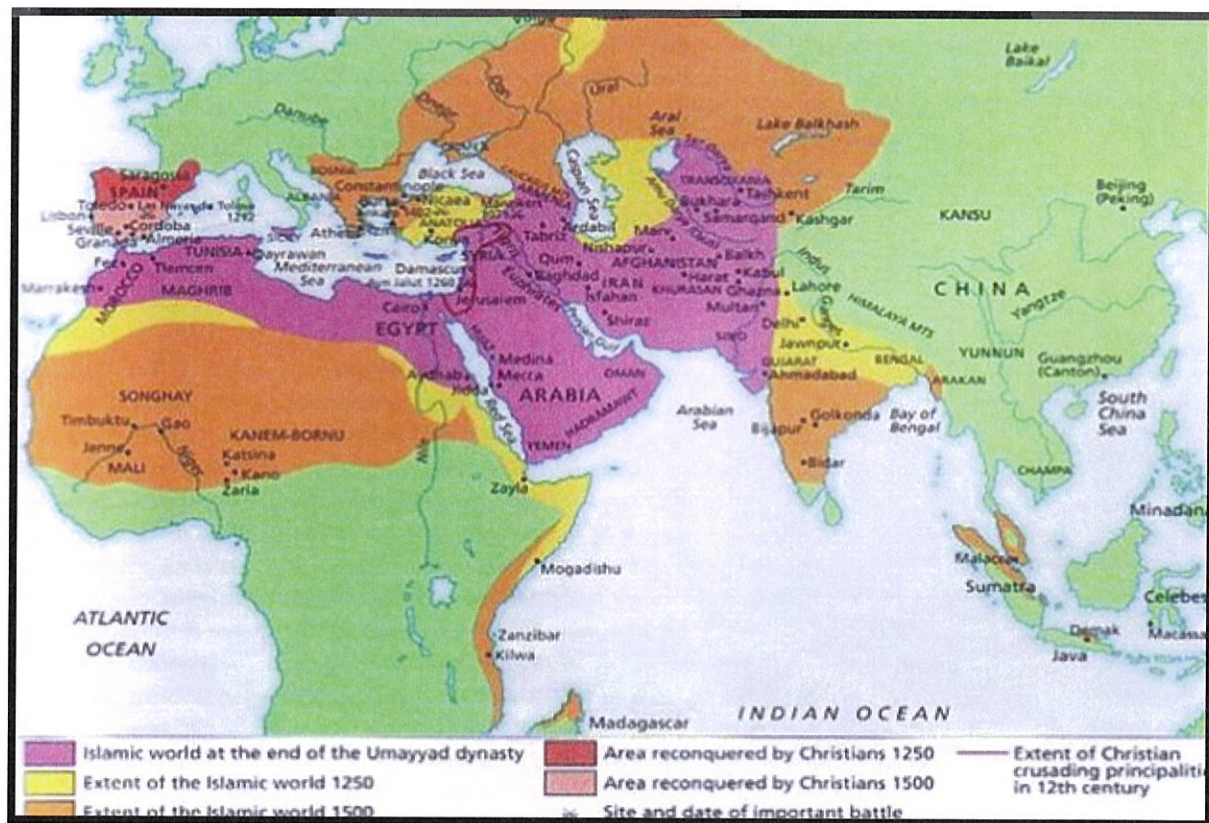
*You will eventually write an essay sharing your answer to this question. For now though, let's just focus on examining these documents.*





## Document 1: Map of Expansion of Islam

Directions: In the space below the map, describe what this map teaches you. Write 6-7 lines.



### Document 2: “The Spread of Islam”

Directions:

1. Annotate the reading well.
2. Create 2 short answer questions that start with “how” or “why” based on the reading. Bullet point your answers to the questions.
  - a. Question 1:

b. Question 2:

3. Discuss with your group:
  - a. In what important ways was the conquest of territory by Muslims different from the spread of Islam?
  - b. To what regions did Islam spread mainly as a result of trade and travel?
  - c. How might laws tolerating other religions have affected the spread of Islam among the population?

**A Slow Process.** In the century after Muhammad's death, Muslims conquered territory "from the Atlantic to the borders of China." Many students reading this often wrongly imagine that this huge region instantly became "Islamic," meaning that most of the people living in those lands quickly became Muslims. To the contrary, the spread of Islam in these vast territories took centuries, and Muslims made up a small minority of the population for a long time. In other words, the expansion of territory under Muslim rule happened very rapidly, but the spread of Islam in those lands was a much slower process. There are several kinds of historical evidence of this gradual conversion process that we will examine in this lesson.

**"Let there be no compulsion in religion."** The Qur'an specifies, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2: 256). This verse states that no person can ever be forced to accept religion against his or her will. It tells Muslims that they cannot force people to convert to Islam. Muhammad set a precedent as the leader of Madinah. Under his leadership, the Muslims practiced tolerance towards those of other religions. They were signers of the Constitution of Madinah and of treaties with the non-Muslim groups. According to tradition, Muhammad often discussed religious ideas with the Jews, Christians, and polytheists (believers in many gods), and he heard their questions about his teachings. The Qur'an records some of the questions that people put to Muhammad, and his replies. Muslim leaders after Muhammad were required to be tolerant, based on the authority of both the Qur'an (in this and many other verses), and the Sunnah, that is, custom practiced by Muhammad or by early members of the Muslim community.

With some exceptions, Muslim leaders have adhered to this precedent over time. One major type of evidence for tolerance by Muslim political leadership is the persistence of many religious minorities in the lands Muslims have ruled. Spain is one example, where Christians and Jews lived and worshipped under Muslim rule and contributed to the society in many ways. The writings of well-known Jewish and Christian scholars, physicians, scientists, and artisans still exist. After the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain following the conquests of Ferdinand and Isabella, Jews settled in North Africa under Muslim rule. They were also invited by the sultan of the Ottoman empire to settle in Istanbul. Some of these communities still exist today. In Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey, for example, Christian and Jewish groups that pre-date the coming of Islam still exist, as do the Coptic Christians in Egypt, after 1400 years of Muslim rule there.

**Becoming Muslim.** Muhammad preached Islam at Makkah and Madinah in Arabia for about twenty-three years, while he received revelation of the Qur'an, according to Islamic teachings. For the first ten years (612 to 622 CE), he preached publicly at Makkah. After the migration to Madinah he preached for ten years, until his death in 632, only in his own house—the first *masjid* (mosque)—to people who came to hear him. Preaching in houses or in the *masjid* became the pattern in Islam.

To accept Islam, a person only has to make the profession of faith (*shahada*) in front of two or more witnesses. Even after a person has accepted Islam, he or she may take a long time to learn and apply its practices, going through many different stages or levels of understanding and practice over time. As Islam spread among large populations, this process was multiplied.

Different individuals and social classes may have had different understandings of Islam at the same time. Also, many local variations and pre-Islamic customs remained, even after societies had majority Muslim populations for a long time. These differences have been a source of diversity among Muslim societies and regions.

**Growth of Muslim population.** It is quite easy to map the large territory ruled by different Muslim political groups, or to illustrate the expansion of an empire. We can shade in areas of a map, and we can track the dates of Muslim rulers and dynasties from the time of Muhammad to the present day. It is more difficult, however, to understand why historians speak of a geographic area as a “Muslim region,” “Muslim society,” “Muslim civilization,” or even “the Islamic world.” At a minimum, such terms must mean that most of the people who lived in those places considered themselves to be Muslims, that is, people who believed in the religion called Islam. By what point in time did the majority of people in those places accept Islam, and how rapid was its spread? What effect did the gradual or rapid spread of Islam have on language, customs, art, and politics? How did the fact that many people were converting to Islam relate to the development of Muslim culture and civilization? We know, of course, that substantial numbers of people in those regions continued to practice the faiths they had belonged to before Islam, including Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Hindus and others. The social contributions of people of these religions continued under Muslim rule. As these former majorities became minorities, how were they affected? How did the presence of a large region in which the majority of its inhabitants were Muslim affect adjoining regions where the majority accepted other faiths?

**The process of conversion.** In the decades after Muhammad’s death, nearly all of the inhabitants of Arabia accepted Islam, except Christian and Jewish communities, which were allowed to continue practicing their faiths. As Muslim rule extended into regions beyond the Arabian tribal system, however, *khalifas*, that is, the successors of the Prophet as leaders of the Muslim community, did not encourage conversion to Islam among the populations of newly conquered areas.

Nevertheless, during the early caliphates (632–750) non-Arabs began to accept Islam. Conversion took place at first among the lowest classes of people. Men and women migrated to Muslim garrison cities to look for jobs and to offer their services to the ruling group. Learning about Islam in these centers, some converted and expanded the Muslim population. These migrants became associates, or *mawali*, of Arab tribes, a traditional method of integrating outsiders. Some migrant Arab and *mawali* converts founded families that later made important contributions in preserving and spreading Islamic knowledge. They became scholars of Islamic law, history, literature, and the sciences. In this way, Islam spread in spite of the policies of political rulers, not because of them.

During the years of the Umayyad Caliphate (Umayyad dynasty) from 661–750 CE, the overwhelming majority of non-Arab populations of the empire, which stretched from Morocco to Inner Eurasia, did not practice Islam. Toward the end of that time, the North African Berbers became the first major non-Arab group to accept the faith. Within a few centuries, Christianity disappeared almost completely in North Africa (today’s Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco), though Christian groups persisted in many other Muslim regions. Jews remained as a small minority, with many living in Muslim Spain. The spread of Islam among Iranians and other peoples of

Persia was the second major movement, beginning about 720 CE. Both of these early groups of converts caused problems for the central government. In North Africa, Berbers set up an independent caliphate, breaking up the political unity of Islam. In Persia, the revolution arose that replaced the Umayyad with the Abbasid dynasty in 750, though only a small proportion of the population of Iraq (ancient Mesopotamia, centered on the Tigris-Euphrates valley) had at that time accepted Islam. From then, however, Islam was no longer the religion of a single ethnic or ruling group, and the rates of conversion climbed more rapidly in lands under Muslim rule.

For example, Arab Muslim forces conquered Egypt in 642, but by 700 few Egyptians had become Muslims. By 900 CE, about fifty percent of the population was probably Muslim, and by 1200, more than 90 percent. In Syria, Islam spread even more slowly. There, the 50-percent mark was not reached until 1200, nearly six hundred years after the arrival of Islam. Iraq and Iran probably reached a Muslim majority by around 900 CE, like Egypt. In much of Spain and Portugal, Islam became established in the 500 years following the initial conquests of 711 CE, though it may never have become the majority faith. After Spanish Catholic armies completed the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, many Muslims and Jews were either expelled from Spain or converted to Christianity. Islam continued to exist, however, until after 1600. As in Spain and Portugal, Islam withered away in Sicily, the Mediterranean island that Muslims had conquered in the ninth century.

In Persia, Inner Eurasia, and India, Muslim law treated Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Hindus just as it treated Jews and Christians. Muslim rulers offered adherents of these religions protection of life, property, and freedom of religious practice in exchange for the payment of a tax, as an alternative to military service. In Sind (northwestern India), the Buddhist population seems to have embraced Islam in the eighth and ninth centuries. Buddhism disappeared entirely in that region. Hinduism, however, declined there more slowly than Buddhism did.

All of the lands described above had Muslim rulers. After the decline of the unified Muslim empire—from about 750—Islam gradually spread to lands outside the boundaries of Muslim rule. After 1071, Anatolia (or Asia Minor), which makes up most of modern Turkey, came under the rule of Turkish animal-herding groups that had become Muslims. Islam spread gradually for centuries after that, and when the Ottoman Turkish empire enfolded much of southeastern Europe in the mid-fourteenth century, most Albanians and Bosnians, as well as some Bulgarians, became Muslims.

**Continuing Spread.** Beginning in 1192, other Muslim Turkish military groups conquered parts of India, including most of the north all the way to present-day Bangladesh, which borders the Bay of Bengal. The number of Muslims in India gradually increased from that time. The people of Bangladesh had been Buddhists, but beginning about 1300, they rapidly embraced Islam. Elsewhere in India, except for Punjab and Kashmir in the far northwest, Hinduism remained the religion of the majority.

In South India and Sri Lanka, both merchants and Sufi preachers, that is, followers of mystical Islam, spread the faith. By 1300, traders and Sufis also introduced it to Southeast Asia. Over the next two centuries, Islam spread from Malaysia to the great archipelago that is today Indonesia.

Entering a region where Buddhism, Hinduism, and local polytheist religions existed, Islam required several centuries to become well established.

In Inner Eurasia beginning in the eighth century, Islam gradually spread to the original homelands of the Turkic-speaking peoples until it became the main religion of nearly all of them. Islam also spread into Xinjiang, the western part of China, where it was tolerated by the Chinese empire. Islam entered southern China through seaports, such as Guanzhou, the city where the earliest *masjid* exists.

**Africa.** Before 1500, Islam spread widely in sub-Saharan Africa. Before 1000 CE, the first major town south of the Sahara that became majority Muslim was Gao, a commercial center located on the Niger River in Mali. Over the centuries, many other rulers and parts of their populations followed this pattern. By 1040, groups in Senegal had become Muslims. From there, Islam spread to the region of today's Mali and Guinea. Muslims established the kingdom of Mali in the thirteenth century and the Songhai empire from 1465 to 1600. Farther east, Kanem-Bornu near Lake Chad became Muslim after 1100. In West Africa, like Turkestan, India, and Indonesia, traders and Sufis introduced Islam. When rulers accepted the faith, numerous Muslim scholars, lawyers, teachers, and artisans migrated into the region to help build Muslim administration and cultural life. African Muslim scholars became established in major towns like Timbuktu, where they taught and practiced Islamic law as judges. By 1500, Islam was established in West Africa in a wide east-west belt south of the Sahara. Local polytheistic religions remained strong, however, and Islam did not become the majority faith in this region until the nineteenth century.

In East Africa, traders spread Islam along the coast beginning at least by the tenth century. By the fourteenth century, the numerous commercial city-states along the coast from today's Somalia to Tanzania were predominantly Muslim. In the Sudan, south of Egypt, the population of Nubia gradually became Muslim during the fourteenth century, through immigration of Muslim Arab pastoral groups and because Christian rule became weak in that region.

**Strong Governments and the Spread of Islam.** By understanding that the expansion of Muslim rule was different from the spread of Islam, we can see an interesting trend. Ironically, Islam has spread most widely and rapidly among populations at times when Muslim rule was weaker and less unified. When Muslim political regimes were decentralized, disunited, or completely absent, Islam as a religion flourished and often spread to non-Muslims. Influence by traders and Sufis and influence of Muslim scholars, lawyers, and artisans in the cities aided the spread of Islam to new areas. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire in southeastern Europe, or the Sultanate of Delhi, and the later Mogul empire of India had little success in spreading Islam, though they did gain territory. Non-Muslim populations seem to have viewed these powerful, tax-gathering Muslim rulers negatively, and so they resisted conversion to Islam. Whoever did embrace Islam in such circumstances, if not for material gain, usually did so because of the efforts of merchants, teachers, and traveling Sufi preachers, who were not part of the government.



## Document 3: Graphing Rates of Conversion to Islam by Region

The spread of Islam during the medieval period is difficult for historians to describe because there is a lack of population data for a period so long ago. Historians have a lot of evidence that Islam was spreading, but this evidence is hard to quantify. For example, there is ample evidence in literary works and government documents that the Arabic language was spreading, and the number of mosques built during those periods was clearly rising. Literature shows that many writers were concerned with Islamic topics, and chronicles of political history describe issues affecting their Muslim subjects. But determining how rapidly or slowly Islam was spreading and when a majority of the population in different regions had accepted Islam has been a mystery.

**Creative Historical Thinking.** The historian Richard W. Bulliet made a pioneering effort to measure the spread of Islam by making creative use of an important Arabic literary source, the biographical dictionary. Like today's *Who's Who* of prominent Americans, these dictionaries were produced in Muslim regions from a very early period. Compilers of biographical dictionaries collected information about prominent individuals in many walks of life, such as important religious scholars, government officials, judges, poets, and teachers of the Traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*). Biographical dictionaries recorded prominent citizens of a particular city, those who died during the reign of particular rulers or dynasties, or famous individuals in a particular profession. Some of the biographers compiled dictionaries from earlier collections of biographies. Taken together, these sources exist for many regions and provide a wide variety of information on thousands of individuals over centuries.

**What's In a Name?** By studying the biographical data, Bulliet developed a theory showing how rapidly Islam spread in various regions between the sixth and thirteenth centuries. To gather information on conversion to Islam by prominent individuals and families, he took advantage of the traditional Arab practice of naming people. A person might be named, for example, Abdullah al-Dimashqi. Abdullah was his given name, and his family name reveals that he was from Damascus. A name also typically included the father's, grandfather's and even great grandfather's name to identify the family. For example, a biographical dictionary would list a name like Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Sulaiman ibn Yaqub al-Dimashqi. ("Ibn" means "son of.") Each person's biographical entry might include several generations. In Muslim tradition naming a child is very important, and parents are encouraged to give children good names to live up to. Popular names come from the Qur'an, or from prophets, or from important companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

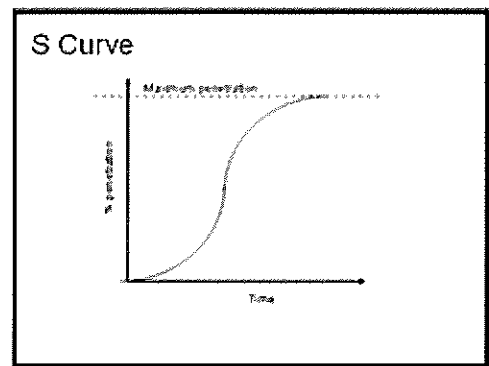
Bulliet noticed that the chains of names often included non-Arab, pre-Islamic names. If the great-great grandfather of an individual carried the Persian name Cyrus, for example, that name pointed to the generation in which the person's family had first converted to Islam. Hundreds of biographical entries show a similar pattern of naming and often describe in the entry how that person converted. By figuring out approximately how many years passed between the conversion of those ancestors and the deaths of individuals listed in the dictionary, Bulliet could plot conversions to Islam in various places. These dictionaries, taken together, provided a data sample made up of thousands of names over many centuries, ranging across major Muslim regions such as Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Muslim Spain.

**How People Adopt New Ideas.** Using a technique from modern scientific data analysis, Bulliet set out to find meaningful patterns in the information on conversion to Islam. He learned about a type of graph used to analyze how human populations adopt technological innovations. For

example, when microwave ovens were invented and marketed for the first time, not many people used them. Then advertising in trade shows and magazines and on radio and television made more people aware of these appliances. Gradually, more people tried the new technology. Some of the early users liked their ovens and told their neighbors. Microwaves became easier to use, and more people saw their advantages. As the number of people who owned them increased, products like microwavable snacks and dinners appeared with cookbooks full of microwave recipes. The number of microwave purchases started to increase rapidly, the price went down, and competing models appeared everywhere. Today, microwave ovens are standard in nearly every household and business in the US. Sure, a few people suspect that “nuking” their food is unhealthy, and may never buy an oven. But the process of adopting microwaves in the US is complete.

The graph for adoption of a new technology looks like an “S-curve.”\* The curve starts out flat, like the bottom of a hill. The risk-takers who first adopt something new are called “Early Adopters.” As more and more people hear about a new idea and buy into it, the bandwagon effect kicks in, and the curve rises more steeply. “Early and Late Majorities” are the people who hop on the bandwagon until 50 percent of the people who will use the new technology is reached and exceeded. Then the market of potential users gets saturated, the pace of adoption slows down, and the curve flattens out. At that point most people already use the new technology, and over time even some “Laggards” join in, waiting until everybody else already done so.

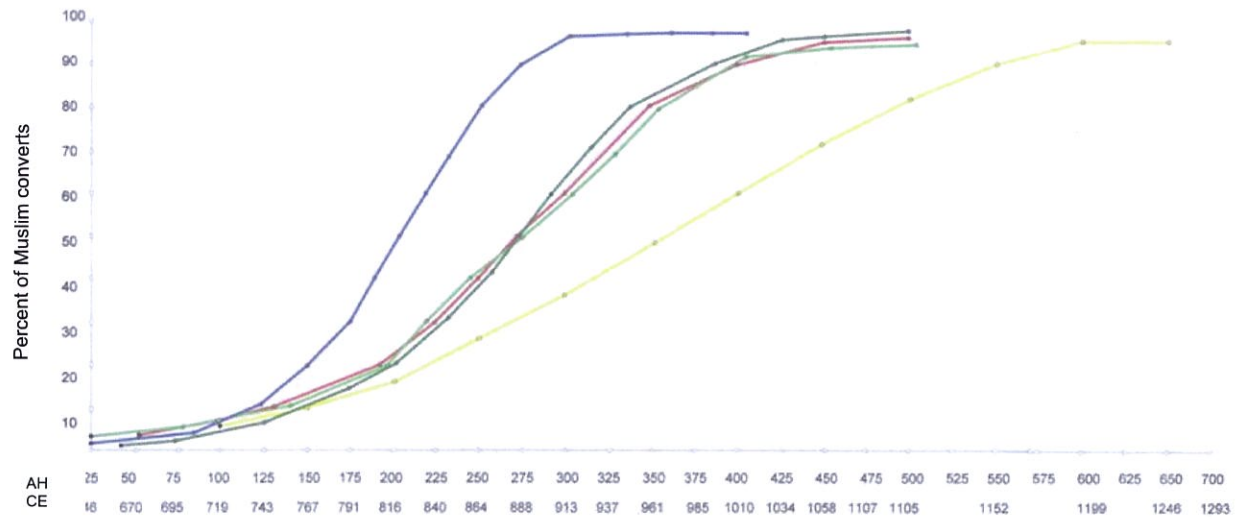
Some people never adopt the technology at all. This model could demonstrate the spread of personal computers, for example, or use of e-mail and the Internet between the 1970’s, when a few specialists used it, to today, when people all over the world communicate online.



**Applying the Model to Religious Conversion.** Bulliet recognized that individuals in the biographical dictionaries made up a population set similar to people adopting a new idea or product. Conversion is a social process in which people gain information about a new faith, at some point adopt that faith, and begin to live by its practices. They also share information with others. They may migrate to a new place and become exposed to the new ideas. The story of Muhammad and the Muslim community showed that at first a very small number believed in his teaching, and they suffered as a minority. As the faith became more prominent and successful, numbers increased rapidly. By the time of Muhammad’s death, much of Arabia had adopted Islam. The story in other regions might not be as dramatic or rapid, but still might follow a similar pattern.

For Bulliet, preparing and analyzing the data involved many decisions and careful guesses in some cases. When he wrote his book, he laid out these problems, such as finding the average length of a generation between an individual, his father, and grandfathers, and dating the various entries accurately on the timeline. In order to see how a creative historian works, it is worthwhile to read his book.

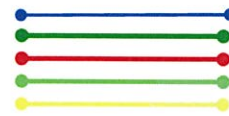
The graph on the next page summarizes some of Bulliet's findings about conversion to Islam in five major regions: Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and Spain, between 646 and 1293 CE, that is, the first six centuries after Muhammad's death. It is clear that the data for conversion to Islam fit the S-curve model. Of course, historians still test these ideas and contribute research on the problem. Having a better idea of how and when Islam spread in these regions helps historians better understand many other events in Muslim history, and compare the spread of Islam with other religions in world history.



#### Spread of Islam in Different Regions by Conversions over Time

AH = Anno Hijri (Muslim calendar) dates  
CE = Common Era dates

Iran  
Iraq  
Syria  
Egypt & Tunisia  
Spain



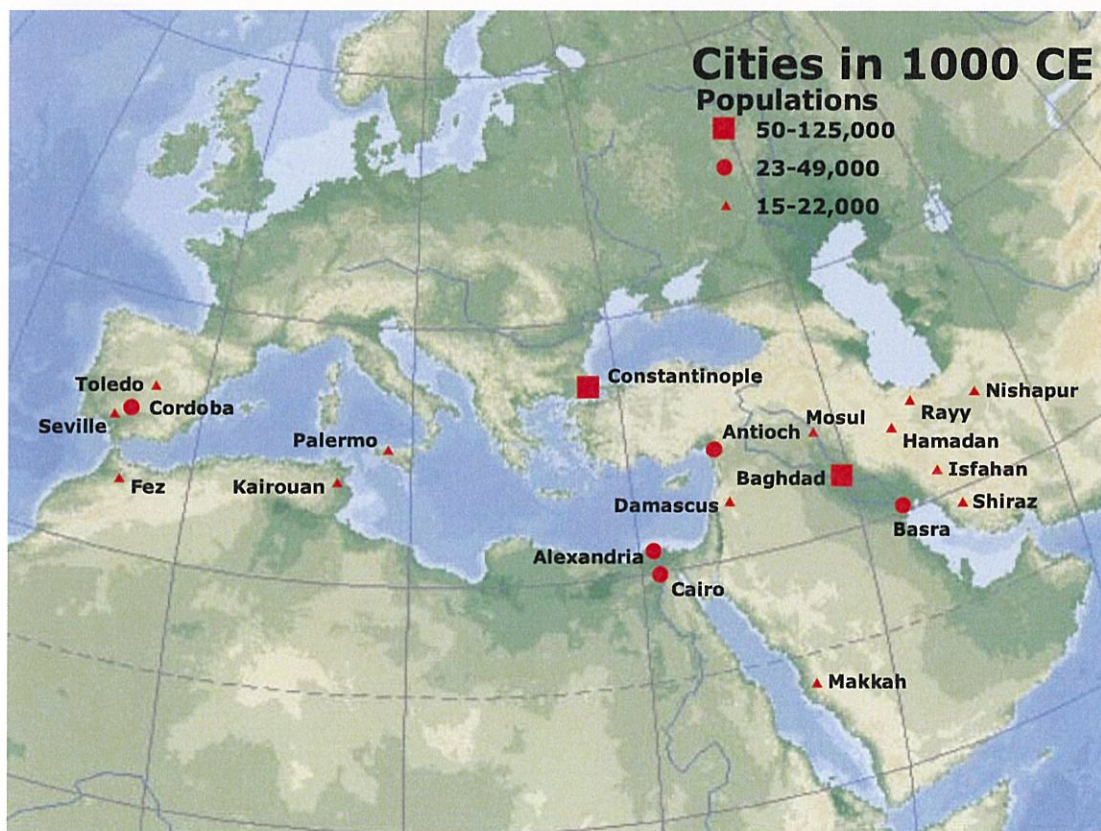
1. What does this graph tell you? Write notes.
2. How exactly did historian Richard W. Bulliet collect this information?
3. Is the origin and basis of this information reliable? Does that impact how you value the graph?

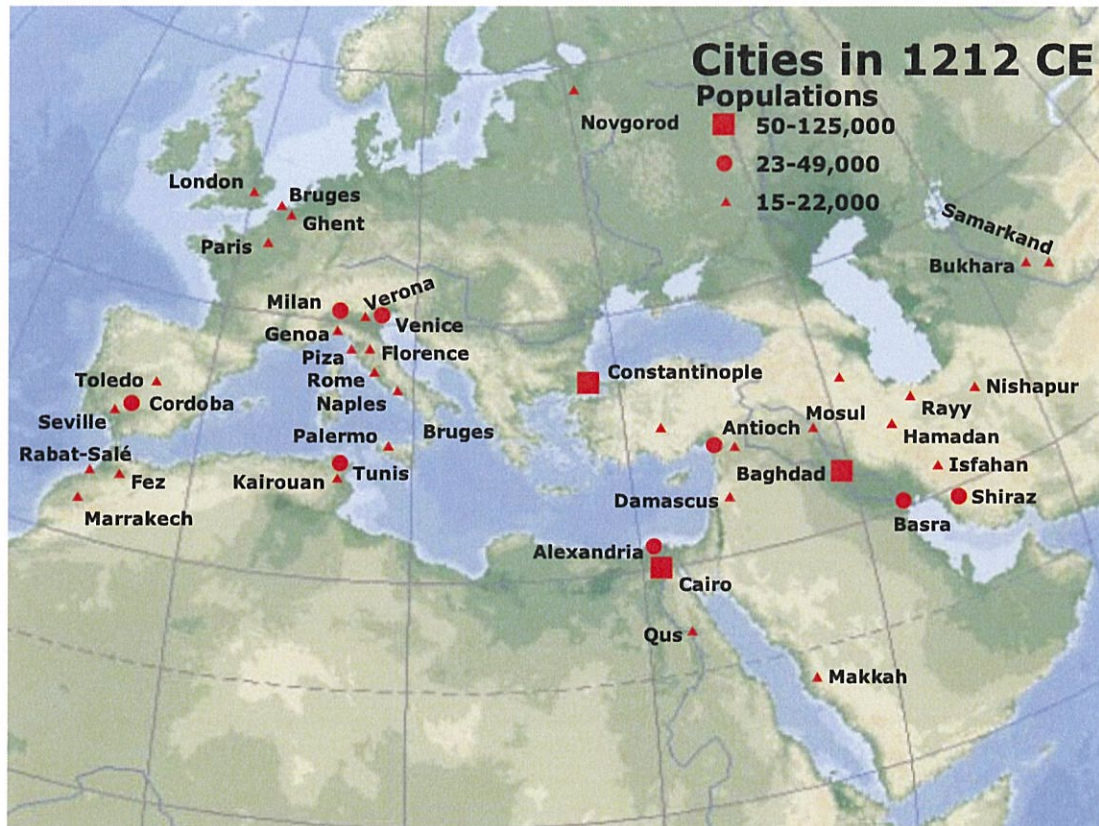
## Document #4 “Islam and Urbanization”

Compare the following four maps by locating and listing those cities that...

1. Existed before the expansion of territory under Muslim rule?
2. Experienced continuity from the earliest map to the last?
3. Appeared in the period between each pair of maps?
4. Appeared outside of territory under Muslim rule, or which were in territory no longer under Muslim rule at the time shown on the map?
5. What conclusions can you draw about the causes and effects of urbanization in the Mediterranean region between 528 and 1000 CE?







Maps adapted from Colin McEvedy, *The New Penguin Atlas of Medieval History* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 25, 41, 57, 75.

## **Document 5: “Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean”**

Directions: Annotate the reading well.

Excerpt from K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 35-36

The expansion and the new activities which became faintly evident in the rhythm of both caravan and trans-oceanic trade from the seventh century onwards in northern and southern China received a great deal of their impetus from the domestic aspirations and developments of the T'ang and Sung empires. However, in the West it was joined by the second and most powerful of the historical forces of the time, the rise of Islam and its expansion across the fertile lands of the Near East and South Asia. Movements of people by definition involve the exchange of ideas, economic systems, social usage, political institutions, and artistic traditions. The spread of Islam subsumed all these things. It may be an exaggeration for lack of definite proof to state that the commerce of the Indian Ocean in the westward direction had entered a period of relative contraction during the later Roman Empire with the weakening of a Mediterranean “world economy.” It is certainly true that the Arab conquests and rapid demographic diffusion and the political integration of Egypt, Syria, Iran, and North Africa created an enormously powerful zone of economic consumption. It was an expanding area that drew its commercial and fiscal strength from refashioning in the West the Mediterranean economy of antiquity and from harnessing the productive resources of the lands around the Indian Ocean in the East. Arab economic success in the early caliphate period was achieved with the aid of the skills possessed by the people of the ancient Near East. But the growth of great urban centers, a universal feature of Islam, and the new capital cities gave rise to an expanding demand for commodities of all kinds and for precious objects. This in turn quickened the pace of long-distance trade. The revival of the sea and caravan routes across the famous international boundary lines, known to merchants since Hellenistic times, owed much to the ability of the Islamic rulers to protect their property and persons against violence. The laws of commercial contracts and the principles of juridical rights, which evolved in the centuries following the foundation of Islam, took into account a cardinal fact of pre-modern trade. Merchants who traveled by land and sea into the realms of foreign princes were prone to take their business elsewhere without the guarantee of a certain amount of commercial freedom secured by reciprocal political rights and obligations.

## Document 6: “The Economy in Muslim Societies”

Directions: Annotate the reading well.

**K.N. Chaudhuri, “The Economy in Muslim Societies,” in F. Robinson, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 124**

In popular imagination, Islam was a religion of the desert which arose in the oasis towns of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt in the seventh century AD. Of course, neither Mecca nor Medina, the twin cities of the Prophet Muhammad, really belonged to the desert or the bedouin nomadic way of life. The Umayyad military victories in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Iran within a decade of Muhammad's death in 632 produced immediate and tangible results, the most notable of which was the consolidation of the two transcontinental trade routes through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The economic foundation of the Muslim world system created by the Umayyads and the Abbasids in the first century of Islam rested on three factors: settled agriculture, urbanization, and long-distance trade. Nomadism and its economy had provided the backdrop to the early Arab expansion and they were not entirely marginalized in the development of urbanized Islam. The bedouin of Arabia did not give up their nomadic way of life; the desert and the camel continued to signify certain aspects of Islam and certainly to signify the context of its movements. Anyone who contemplates the magnificent mihrab of the Great Mosque in Cordoba built in the eight century, with its pure Arab geometry, must be aware that the historical roots of the Islamic world were already strong by the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. But those political leaders and their Arab followers who did migrate to the old and new towns to adopt an urban life soon revived the economic unity of the ancient world, which had been lost with the decline of Rome and Persia.”



**Interior of the Great Mosque, Cordoba, Spain**

Photo by R. Dunn

**Document 7: Excerpt from *Islam: Empire of Faith*.**

**Directions:** Take notes on the portions of the film we watch.